

## **Pastor Dr. Jens-Martin Kruse's Profile Evangelical Lutheran Church Community of Rome**

### **Luther, Pope Francis and the Ecumenism**

Half a millennium lies between Luther and us. The world into which Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 is just as strange to us today as the questions and fears that moved the people of his time and the answers that Luther found. Two other factors are aggravating. On the one hand, Luther is regarded, as far as the present, by many Catholics as the archetype, and the name of the Christian Church is connected with his name. On the other hand, the interest in the Reformation in Italy, unlike in Germany, is usually not particularly great, also because the Reformation is not a determining factor in culture and because the churches of the Reformation, which are present in Italy today, are so small, that they are generally hardly perceived.

This is all the more pleasing to the public attention which the memory of the Reformation in 2017 also provokes in Italy and leads to the fact that many people deal with the epoch of the Reformation and ask with a great openness and curiosity who was actually Martin Luther and what is characteristic of his theology. In my opinion, such an employment with Luther is useful when it satisfies the following aspects:

- (1) Firstly, to present Luther's life and the development of the Reformation to the state of contemporary scientific research in a historical perspective.
- (2) Secondly, the theological concerns of Luther must be appreciated and the question of the impulses for faith, theology and the church are to be found today.
- (3) Thirdly, the work with Luther today must serve the ecumenical approach between our churches and contribute to the visible unity of Christendom.

History, theology, and ecumenism - the three key words with which I would like to introduce some important aspects of the topic "Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation in Germany".

#### **1. Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation**

Let us start with the question of what happened on October 31, 1517, to which the Reformation memorandum refers in 2017, in memory of Martin Luther's so-called thesis. But whether or not he actually nailed his 95 theses on the force of indulgences to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg on this day has long been controversial in research. Luther himself has reported nothing about such an act. The first to speak of a thesis are Philipp Melancthon and Luther's secretary Georg Rörer. Both were not yet in Wittenberg at this time and did not experience the happenings as eyewitnesses. But what we know is that on October 31, 1517, Luther wrote to two high ecclesiastical dignitaries responsible to him, to Archbishop Abrecht and his local bishop, Hieronymus Schulz, to whom he attached his 95 theses.

Why was Luther doing this? According to Luther's perception as a pastor, the indulgences of his time were detrimental to the piety of the Christians because many were convinced that they had been secured by the purchase of indulgences of their eternal salvation. Luther considered this a serious error, and therefore called upon the bishops to stop this abuse. The important task of a bishop saw Luther to "ensure that the people learn the gospel and the love of Christ. For nowhere has Christ commanded to preach the indulgences; But to preach the gospel, he has emphatically recommended. "

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In this small passage from Luther's letter to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, his theological basic concern as well as the church-critical potential of his thoughts are expressed. Luther's intention was to make the Gospel accessible and comprehensible to the people as a liberating message. For this, a new turn to Jesus Christ is necessary. Accordingly, the 95 theses begin with a thesis which refers to the penance. Luther says: All life is to be a repentance. It is not only the sacrament of repentance, but the word of Jesus "Repentance, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 4:17), according to Luther, refers to the whole life of a Christian.

In this sense, Luther was convinced that the Church needed a reformation, a renewal at any time, and therefore called upon the Church and the theology of his time to turn back to the ground of the Christian faith. But it was perfectly clear to Luther that this reformation could not be led by a man. On the contrary, the renewal of the Church is ultimately the sole concern of God, and the latter alone knows the time when this reformation will come. In this light, Luther made a series of proposals for reforms with his theses, in order to remedy individual grievances. But he did not want to found a new church or to have understood or described himself as a reformer. Luther saw himself as a tool of God and wanted to contribute to the renewal of the one Church of Jesus Christ from the Spirit of the Gospel.

The 95 theses were written in Latin and were not put under pressure by Luther, because he did not want to clarify the question of how to understand the indulgence in a broad public, but in a learned discussion among theologians. If we look at Luther's own intention, the publication of the Reformation can not be understood as the beginning of the Reformation. The 95 theses are by no means a revolutionary document, but "they represent quite Catholic concerns and move within the framework of Catholic theology." Accordingly Cardinal Koch's verdict is: "With his theses wanted Luther would not break with the Catholic Church, but renew it. "

And yet, "in the background of the 95 theses, one can feel an earthquake whose consequences were quite unpredictable at the time." For Luther's proposals for reform stirred the genuine interests of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Thus the reading of the 95 theses in the Roman Curia and with Pope Leo X. caused the concern that they could undermine the teaching of the Church and the authority of the Pope. Therefore, in the summer of 1518, a good six months after the thesis, a case against Luther was opened in Rome. This process, which ended with the excommunication of Luther in 1521, is determined by "a basic ambiguity". Luther asked questions about the understanding of indulgences and presented biblical arguments for his position. But although he had been assured that he would be heard, he was told again and again that he had to be revoked or condemned as a heretic. The Jesuit Giancarlo Pani judges "Fu un dialogo tra sordi [...] Lutero fu condannato per il rifiuto opposto all'autorità della Chiesa, con motivazioni che, da una parte a dall'altra, andavano ben oltre il problema delle indulgenze; E tuttavia [...] non gli venne mai indicata la ragione per cui la dottrina che egli contrastava era fondata su una precisa esegesi biblica, sia pure radicalmente diversa. "

## **2. Justification by faith alone - The central theme of Luther's theology**

Martin Luther was convinced that the biblical texts are highly relevant to people who meet them centuries after their emergence. He had, in his intensive reading of the Holy Scriptures, found an answer to the long questioning question: "How can I get a gracious God?" In reflection on the

Epistle to the Romans, Luther had discovered that God's righteousness was not a sinner Punishment, but as a righteous righteousness.

The justification of the sinner from faith, without the law of works, formed for Luther the center of the biblical message and the Christian faith. Luther saw this message in a particularly concise form with the apostle Paul. In the Galatians and Romans, for example, the Apostle says: "Man is made righteous by faith, without works of law" (Rom 3:28). In his translation of the Bible into the German language, Luther added in Romans 3: 28 the famous "alone": "by faith alone". Even in Luther's own time, he had been told that the "alone" was not in the text. For Luther, however, this was not a valid argument. "These donkeys understand neither German nor Greek," he countered to his critics. For the meaning of the text is clear: Paul wants to say here that one is justified by faith and not by works of the law. The "alone" thus makes the meaning of the text clear, by emphasizing the antithesis which Paul formulates in German. In Luther's understanding, however, this does not mean that we need to do nothing; our works do not matter anyway, justify God anyway, whatever we do or leave. No, what is meant is, in Jesus Christ, God has turned his grace to all human beings unconditionally, granted them access to his salvation. The good works, commitment, and commitment to the cause of God in our world are not the presupposition of our acceptance by God, but they follow from it as fruits of the freedom of the children of God.

But why did the doctrine of justification have so fundamental a meaning to Luther? We come closer to this question when we look at another passage from the Letter to the Romans with which, in Luther's point of view, his discovery is connected with the nature of God's righteousness. In Romans 1:17 it is said, "For in the gospel is revealed the righteousness which is before God, which comes from faith in faith; As it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' "In a retrospect from the year 1545, a year before his death, Luther describes how his decisive theological insight in his reflection on this biblical passage has revealed to him. Luther reports that his eyes were opened to what the apostle Paul really meant by the expression "righteousness of God". Luther writes that he had previously hated this word "righteousness of God" because he had understood it philosophically, as a formal, active righteousness. In the background is the idea that God is righteous and judges the lives of men, punishes sin and guilt as the judge. The question which profoundly worried Luther and the people of his time was: What gifts can man pay his debt before God? How can he live to escape the punishment for unpaid sin and guilt? Full of anxiety and anxiety, Luther looked to the Last Judgment because he knew that he could never lead a perfect life without any transgression of God's commandments in thought, words, or works.

The decisive turning point came in - as Luther writes - God had pity on him, and he had looked more closely at the connection of the words. In the struggle with the Bible text, Luther discovered that the phrase "the righteous lives by faith" means that the righteous lives by the righteousness which God gives him. What is meant is therefore not a punitive, active, but the passive righteousness "by which the merciful God justifies us by means of faith." He had felt like new-born, "the doors were opened, and I had entered Paradise," writes Luther, and you can still perceive these words to-day, which liberating power Luther has placed in this understanding of the righteousness of God.

After briefly discussing the historical connections between the beginning of the Reformation and justification by faith on one of the main themes of Luther's theology in the first two sections, I would like to briefly outline the final section on the ecumenical dimension of the Reformation memorandum in 2017 A reflective intermediate step, which is intended to make clear the "path from the conflict to the community", which has been traced back in recent years.

### **3. Towards a Common Reformation**

Every memory of important historical events and people poses the question: How do we deal with the legacy of the past? This heritage contains mostly helpful as well as incriminating pages. This is all the more true if, as in the case of Martin Luther, this legacy was perceived and judged in the course of centuries. "The path from conflict to communion," says Cardinal Koch, "has begun, above all, with the critical examination and overcoming of the traditional negative image of Martin Luther and the Reformation in the Roman Catholic Church." In *Memory and Memory*, The past can not be changed. However, what is reminiscent of the past and how this happens can change over time. And this is what the Reformation thinks about. Crucial is how Martin Luther and the Reformation are told today. It is not a question of telling a story, but of telling this story differently. "To-day, as Pope Francis said," We can not extinguish what has happened, but we do not want the burden Past debt further poisons our relationships. "

For the relations between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church it is hardly possible to say that today the two churches can "share the history of the Lutheran Reformation together". They continue to work from different starting points, but because of the similarities that have been achieved in the ecumenical dialogues since the end of the Second Vatican Council, now together and in an ecumenical spirit. The introduction of a distinction in the concept of "Reformation" has proved very helpful. The word "Reformation" can refer, firstly, to a series of historical events in the 16th century, ranging from Luther's theses in 1517 to the Augsburg Peace of Peace in 1555 or to the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and the division of the Western Church leads. In this perspective, there are a variety of actors. Among them were Luther and Melanchthon, the pope, cardinals, princes, politicians, and many others. It is important to make this clear. For it is this story in which the Western Church was divided. But if there were so many actors in that history, their result can not be attributed to Luther one-sidedly. Rather, today both churches agree that the division of Christendom was the result of complex interactions between numerous actors, so that the Reformation in this sense is as much the work of Luther as the Roman leaders and numerous political actors. "The Reformation in this sense as an event, which has led to the division of the Church, is now, indeed, regret, mourning, and confession of guilt."

In a second sense, the word "Reformation" denotes the whole of the theological insights of Luther. Here we can discover many things which are common to Lutherans and Catholics. Thus in 1999, a joint statement on the doctrine of justification could be found that there is a consensus between Lutherans and Catholics in the fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification, and the document "From conflict to fellowship" comes to the conclusion that the quarrel of the 16th century The end of the sentence and the reasons for the convictions. For this reason, Catholics must no longer condemn Luther as an arch-heretic who had broken with the old Church. And Lutherans must no longer defend the Wittenberg theologians uncritically or worship those who had broken with the allegedly dark medieval age. Today, a very differentiated image of Luther and the Reformation can be drawn together. Luther did not, on the other hand, reject the ecclesiastical doctrine of tradition, but sought to renew it; He did not primarily provoke a break with the Church, though this has been an effect; He did not hastily create church structures to build a new church, though this was the result of the clashes. But the Council of Trent did not condemn Luther, as Leo X had done before, but did not one-sidedly reject its reform, but responded in a very differentiated way to its reforms, indeed implicitly, without mentioning them, This is all the more true of the Second Vatican Council. "The movement of the churches towards one another has, in our day, been given new and very beneficial impulses by Pope Francis.

### **4. Pope Francis and Luther**

To date, there have been individual representatives of Luther's Catholic research who have opted for differentiated approaches to Luther and the Reformation, without any significant influence on the

view of ecclesiastical grief. With Pope Francis, this has changed in an astonishing and wonderful way. Within a short time, he has become one of the decisive actors and impulses of ecumenism. His ecumenical action is supported and motivated by faith in the resurrection of Jesus. The conviction, therefore, is "that, just as the stone has been rolled away from the tomb, all the obstacles which still stand in the way of the full communion between us can be cleared." The ecumenism, and with his words and gestures, in the truest sense of the word as a pontifex, proves himself to be a man who succeeds in removing obstacles and building bridges between the churches. In doing so, Pope Francis does not pursue a 'master plan' for the unity of the Church, but knows that unity is a gift that the Holy Spirit brings about on the road. It is therefore understandable why the meetings with other Christians and churches are so important to Pope Francis: "To meet each other, to see one another's face, to give one another peace, to pray for one another, are essential dimensions on the way to the restoration of the full communion Which we strive for. "

Pope Francis does not make any demands that must be fulfilled first so that an ecumenical encounter can take place. On the other hand, he makes his own way to visit other Christian churches and is also prepared to go on a terrain that is unknown until now. As with a beaded cord, these ecumenical encounters are drawn through the pontificate of Pope Francis, each setting new accents by which the communion between the churches is deepened. Be it the encounter with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Jerusalem on 25 May 2014, the first visit of a Pope to an evangelical Pentecostal community in Caserta on 28 July 2014 and in a reformed Walden municipality in Turin on 22 June 2015 The meeting with representatives of Protestant communities in Bangui on 29 November 2015, the first meeting with the Russian patriarch Kyrill on 12 February 2016 or the joint trip to the island of Lesbos with patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Hieronymus.

For the dialogue with the Lutheran Church the visit of Pope Francis in the Church of Christ in Rome on 15 November 2015 is particularly important. On the one hand, the Pope, with his guest gift of a sacred meal, symbolically emphasized the hope of a common Eucharist. On the other hand, during this visit to a Lutheran parish, Pope Francis called on his Church to "boldly undertake an attentive and honest re-evaluation of the intentions of the Reformation and the person of Martin Luther", against the backdrop of the "Ecclesia semper reformanda" , The Church, which is always to be renewed, on the track which the Council has laid. "

In this way, Pope Franziskus himself goes on brightly. For example, in the course of his travels to Lund, he paid tribute to Martin Luther in a very positive way. On the return flight from Armenia to Rome, on June 26, 2016, Pope Francis answered the question of a journalist after the gifts of the Reformation: "I believe that the intentions of Martin Luther were not wrong: he was a reformer. Perhaps some methods were not the right one, but at that time [...] we see that the Church was really not an imitative model: there was corruption in the church, there was seclusion, attachment to money and power. On the other hand, he protested. Besides, he was intelligent; He has taken a step forward and justified himself for his actions. And today, we Lutherans and Catholics, with all the Protestants, agreed on the doctrine of justification: on this important point he had not been wrong. "A few days before Lund, Pope Francis was asked by the Jesuit Ulf Jonsson in an interview what he had said His trip to Sweden on the occasion of the commemoration of 500 years of the Reformation. This is what Pope Francis has answered with an important and pioneering reference for ecumenism: "There comes a single word in my mind: avvicinarmi (ital. 'Approach me'). My hope and expectation are to get closer to my brothers and sisters. The proximity is good for everyone. Distance dagegben makes us sick. When we move away from one another, we lock ourselves in ourselves and become monads - unable to meet. We let ourselves be caught by fear. One has to learn to go beyond oneself to meet others. If we do not, then we Christians also fall apart. My expectation is to take a step closer to my brothers and sisters who live in Sweden. "

When asked what the Roman Catholic Church could learn from the Lutheran tradition, Pope Francis answered in this interview: "There are two words in my mind: 'Reform' and 'Scripture'. I'll try to explain that. The first word is 'reform'. In the beginning, what Luther was doing was a gesture of reform in a difficult moment for the Church. Luther wanted to solve a complex situation. [...] The second word is 'Scripture', the word of God. Luther has taken a great step to put the word of God in the hands of the people. Reform and Scripture are the two fundamental things we can deepen in the Lutheran tradition. "Given the fact that Luther was a heretical and schismatic in the eyes of Catholics, the significance of these worthy testimonies of Pope Francis is scarcely enough and is of fundamental importance for the rapprochement between the churches. All these positive signs are condensed in the ecumenical worship celebrated by Pope Francis and Bishop Younan, the President of the Lutheran World Federation, on the occasion of commemoration of the Reformation 500 years ago in the Cathedral of Lund on 31 October 2016. Finally, I would like to briefly present this ecumenical event and show some perspectives that can lead to a further path to the visible unity of Christendom.

### **5. The joint reformation commemoration in the Lund on October 31, 2016**

We are currently experiencing a departure in ecumenism, which would not have been conceivable a few years ago. For the first time in history it has become possible in 2017 that a remembrance of the Reformation, which began with the famous 95 theses on the indulgence of Martin Luther (1483-1546), is no longer of mutual criticism and delimitation but is shared and shaped by the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church in an ecumenical way.

The ecumenical worship, which Pope Francis, together with Bishop Munib Younan, the President of the Lutheran World Federation, on October 31, 2016, is an ecumenical sign of all that will happen in 2017 with a view to the memory of the Reformation The Cathedral of Lund / Sweden. It is an amazing and wonderful development "from conflict to fellowship" that has made this ecumenical worship possible. In 1521 Pope Leo X Martin Luther was expelled from the Church, 495 years later his successor, Pope Francis, traveled to Sweden to commemorate the Reformation together with Lutheran Christians. And not only that: in the presence of the Pope, God is thanked for the good that the whole Church has received through the Reformation. This is the beginning of worship! The Pope himself prays: "O Holy Spirit, help us to rejoice in the gifts which have come into the Church through the Reformation."

It may be that the word 'historically' is sometimes used too hastily, but it is indeed true for Lund's worship. "Who would have dreamed before 100, 50 years ago, even 20 years ago, that in 2016 the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation would be host to an Ecumenically Reformation God service. Who could have imagined that this would be shared by the President (and Secretary-General) of the Lutheran World Federation as well as by the Pope. But on the day of the Reformation in 2016, it has become possible: the "Reformation" was conceived for 50 years, and the future was looked at. "

What has happened in Lund is well illustrated by the image of the entry: the Pope, accompanied by the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan and General Secretary Martin Junge, enters the Lund Cathedral. All three are dressed very similarly, with white albe and red stoles - in the color of the Reformation festival. If someone sees the image of the three white-dressed men standing in front of the altar, he would not think that the man in the middle has a unique rank in the church. What an overwhelming sign! Someone said on the morning of the Reformation Day that the Pope would steal the show. He did not. What a strength is that the Pope and with him the Roman Catholic Church could withdraw so that Pope and President Younan, Cardinal Koch and Secretary General boy could really lead the worship together. The lived community and the reconciliation between Lutherans and Catholics were thus visible and tangible.

The theological template for this service was the ecumenical dialogue text "From the conflict to the fellowship" presented by the International Lutheran Catholic Commission on Unity in 2013, with a view to the 2014 reformation agenda. For the first time, a theological text is now being translated into a liturgy and thus has a very special significance. In this liturgy, a tripartite structure has been chosen, which expresses the crucial issues for the ideas of the Reformation: thanks to the sense of guilt - the obligation to continue on the way to the community.

In his sermon, Pope Franziskus has embraced the main theology of the Reformation and went far beyond what his predecessors had said on the subject. Pope Paul VI. Was aware that the Pope himself was an obstacle on the road to the unity of the Church. Pope John Paul II saw a common starting point in Luther's call for repentance. Pope Benedict XVI Acknowledged the serious devotee in Luther. Pope Francis confirms the fruits of a more than fifty-year-old ecumenical dialogue, expressing his thanks in his homily "that the Reformation has helped to place the Holy Scriptures in the center of the life of the Church." Francis then: "The spiritual experience of Martin Luther asks us and reminds us that we can do nothing without God. 'How do I get a gracious God?' - that is the question Luther kept on doing. In fact, the question of the right relationship with God is the decisive question of life. [...] By the principle of grace alone, we are reminded of the fact that God always takes the initiative and responds to every human response, and at the same time tries to trigger this response. Hence the doctrine of justification expresses the essence of human existence before God."

Conversely, it is also a clear sign that the Lutheran World Federation does not celebrate the central worship of the Reformation as a Lutheran worship to which the ecumenical partners are invited, not as worship together with the other Protestant churches, but also as ecumenical worship To whom the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, together with the Pope, invite ecumenical partners. This is not self-evident! It takes seriously that Luther wanted to renew the church and not to split it. It is therefore appropriate, after 50 years of ecumenical dialogue, to commemorate the Reformation, especially with the Christians, of whom the Lutheran Christians were separated by the events of the 16th century.

During the service, Pope Francis and President Younan signed a joint declaration, which emphasized two points: pain on the division of the church and the common commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation. The perception of the longing for unity is remarkable. It says: "Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist in a meal as a concrete expression of full unity. We are experiencing the pain of all those who share their lives, but can not share God's redeeming presence in the eucharistic meal. We recognize our shared pastoral responsibility to meet the spiritual hunger and thirst of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical efforts. We wish them to advance ". The mention of the most affected by the split makes the goal of ecumenical efforts seem more than urgent. From this, a concrete assignment for the solution of this so-called question for our time can be read out without further ado. Thus, the joint statement ends with a "call to Catholics and Lutherans worldwide", "undaunted and creative, joyful and hopeful in their resolve to continue the great journey that lies ahead. ... In Christ, rooted and proven, we renew our decision to be faithful messengers of God's boundless love for all mankind. "

## **6. A new ecumenical departure**

Whoever perceives the "signs of the times" comes to the insight: the dispute over the Reformation, by which the church was separated in the 16th century, is over. Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians today can together acknowledge and acknowledge Luther's true theological concerns that he did not want to break with the Catholic Church and found a new church. Luther's intention lay in the renewal of all Christendom from the gospel spirit. "The Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century is therefore to be understood and appreciated as a process of reforming the Church by re-

discovering the Gospel as its foundation, more precisely the gospel of the justification of the sinful man not by his works, but By faith in Jesus Christ ... Martin Luther and his Wittenberg Reformation are a clear proof that a true reform of the Church can only be achieved by concentrating the Christian existence and the church life on the person Jesus Christ as the living Word of God. ] Can be achieved. "

If the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church can thus jointly appreciate the legacy of Luther and the Reformation today, what Cardinal Kasper said when he concluded: "The unity is closer today than 500 years ago. It has already begun. We are not on the road to separation, but on the road to unity after 2015. "In this perspective, the year 2017 is an important opportunity and an obligation for Lutherans and Catholics to be on the road to visible unity of Christendom in fact get ahead. "In a world where many conversations are interrupted, the joint reformation commemorates the high value of the dialogue. In a world wounded by violence and wars, it tells the story of conquered conflicts. In a world which is unclear about the meaning of faith and religion, it tells of the transforming power and the beauty of our common faith, which enables us to compassionate and joyful witness. "

This opportunity, which offers the first joint reformation commemoration for the renewal of the Church and for further steps on the road to unity, is absolutely essential. "It would be good for both Churches, many people who are waiting for it, and the world that needs our common testimony today." "Let us," says Pope Francis, "encourage the hesitations that we have inherited from the past, Aside, we open our hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love (Rom 5: 5), in order, together with rapid steps, to meet the blessed day of our re-found full communion. "

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